



House of Commons
International Development
Committee

**Assessing DFID's
results in nutrition
Review: report from the
Sub-Committee on the
Work of ICAI**

First Report of Session 2021–22

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 13 July 2021*

The International Development Committee

The International Development Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Department for International Development and its associated public bodies.

On 1 September 2020, DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office were merged to form the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The Committee remains responsible for scrutiny of those parts of FCDO expenditure, administration and policy that were formerly the responsibility of DFID.

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Current membership of the Sub-Committee on the work of the Independent Commission on Aid Impact (ICAI)

Formally, all members of the Committee are members of the Sub-Committee. In addition, the Committee has established a Sub-Committee core group:

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[Mr Richard Bacon MP](#) (*Conservative, South Norfolk*)

[Sarah Champion MP](#) (*Labour, Rotherham*)

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The current staff of the Committee are Grace Annan (Committee Specialist), Philip Aylett (Second Clerk), Gordon Clarke (Clerk), Mark Doyle (Media and Communications Officer), John-Paul Flaherty (Second Clerk), Paul Hampson (Committee Operations Officer), Rowena Macdonald (Committee Operations Officer), Emma Makey (Senior Committee Specialist), Leo Oliveira (Committee Operations Manager), Alison Pickard (Committee Specialist), Jack Tennant (Assistant Inquiry Manager–Apprentice).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the International Development Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 1223; the Committee's email address is indcom@parliament.uk.

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Conclusions and recommendations

Effectiveness: How valid were DFID's reported nutrition results?

1. We welcome ICAI's positive assessment that UK nutrition programmes have generally been delivering against their objectives. This achievement will have an impact in improving nutrition and tackling malnutrition. However, work is still to be done to improve data gathering on nutrition, both centrally and in recipient countries. Following the expected completion date of September 2021, we would welcome an update on the progress made in implementing ICAI's recommendation on effective data use by 31 October. (Paragraph 15)

Equity: Is the UK's support reaching the most vulnerable?

2. We welcome the good results that UK aid programmes have achieved in reaching some of the most marginalised people within the target groups for nutrition support. This work is often particularly difficult and hazardous, especially in conflict zones. We also welcome the Government's acceptance that further steps should be taken to make sure no one is left behind in the provision of nutrition. The steps that have been taken to embed stronger citizen feedback across the FCDO's work is a positive start. (Paragraph 21)
3. It is vital that the UK and international community do not lose sight of the importance of maintaining support for nutrition while also combatting covid-19 and other diseases. Properly nourished people, especially women and children, are far better equipped to survive infectious disease and to prevent the spread of disease. *We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out what action it is taking to improve nutrition in developing countries, and in particular where it forms part of the Government's covid-19 response.* (Paragraph 25)

Impact: To what extent is UK aid helping to reduce malnutrition?

4. One of the less satisfactory features of aid for nutrition is a focus on the amount of food provided rather than on its quality. We were disappointed to hear that many UK programmes are failing to take full account of the need to improve dietary diversity and quality. (Paragraph 31)
5. *To help the Committee to better understand the balance between improving food quality and food quantity, the Government should set out how it considers these elements when undertaking nutrition programmes.* (Paragraph 32)
6. The evidence we heard indicates there have been improvements in the way UK aid works with the private sector, and we also heard of a specific area of good practice. This is welcome, as commercial agriculture and other private sector players can play a key role in improving nutrition if they are well integrated with the aid effort. However, progress needs to be maintained. *We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out in more detail how it will continue to ensure that best practice and lessons learned from cooperation with the private sector in existing programmes are fed through to new programmes.* (Paragraph 38)

7. We heard mixed views on whether the decisions to merge the FCO and DFID and to depart from a stand-alone nutrition strategy would have a positive impact. Nonetheless, it will be vital to make the most of the opportunities offered by the creation of the FCDO to increase the coherence and global focus of the Government's wider approach on nutrition. This should include working across Government to ensure that the development aspects of nutrition policy are given the priority they deserve. (Paragraph 47)
8. *Although the creation of the new FCDO health directorate is a step forward, this must not lead to any loss of focus on nutrition, which is central to success in so many aspects of development. The FCDO must continue to closely monitor progress against the key nutrition indicators and respond swiftly to urgent needs in crisis situations.* (Paragraph 48)
9. The impacts of climate change and other challenges will make it difficult to maintain the positive results from nutrition programmes in years to come. In the medium and longer term, the UK will need to make significant adjustments to its aid programmes to take account of the interaction of climate change and other factors on food systems. (Paragraph 52)
10. Given these forthcoming difficulties, we were disappointed to hear from the UN Special Envoy that the UK had been showing a "lack of enthusiasm" for the coming Food Systems Summit. The UK has demonstrated leadership in the past decade, not least in convening similar international gatherings. However, some witnesses suggested that the UK had failed to provide full support to this important event, which has the potential to play a key role in tackling both malnutrition and climate change. (Paragraph 53)

Future of UK nutrition aid programmes

11. Given that the evidence we heard made clear the development benefits of UK support to nutrition, we feel it is unhelpful that, months into the relevant financial year, those responsible for such vital programmes still do not know how much has been allocated to support their work. *We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out what its expenditure on nutrition programmes will be in 2021–22, and how this has been conveyed to those delivering these programmes.* (Paragraph 60)

Summary

Malnutrition is a major cause of preventable deaths and constrains social and economic development in the least developed countries. Therefore, donors should make ODA spending on nutrition a priority where the people and governments in countries needing support identify it as a priority. In countries where it is not given the priority it deserves donors must be prepared to provide information on malnutrition's effects on lives, society and the economy and the kinds of support available to tackle it. The Independent Commission on Aid Impact's review, *Assessing DFID's results in nutrition*, has shown that the UK Government, under the auspices of the Department for International Development (DFID), has made nutrition a priority. As a result, DFID reached over 50 million people with nutrition services between 2015 and 2020. The department also built global and national commitments to reduce undernutrition. ICAI's positive report is a signal of the good work and hard effort that has been expended, but more importantly the impact of these nutrition programmes will have saved lives across the world.

ICAI's review has also identified areas where DFID's work could have been better. These include strengthening data systems, investing more in the development of local delivery capacity, and expanding work on healthy diets. It is now up to the newly merged Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to take action on ICAI's recommendations, and the Committee welcomes that all the recommendations have been accepted.

The review shows that there is a good basis on which FCDO can capitalise on the positive progress made to date. During our evidence session, we were updated on the action that has since been taken. If that is sustained, this is an area in which the FCDO can take a lead on the global stage, and we would encourage the new department to prioritise in this area, as sustained effort is required to eradicate malnutrition. However, in light of a reduction in expenditure in Official Development Assistance, questions remain about whether the achievements made to date will endure.

1 Introduction

1. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) published its Review, *Assessing DFID's results in nutrition* (the Review) in September 2020.¹ The Government's response to the Review was published in October 2020.² Our report examines the Review and response and makes conclusions and recommendations.

Conduct of scrutiny

2. We took evidence from ICAI and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in relation to the Review and the Government's response. We also took evidence from Dr Agnes Kalibata, UN Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit, Martha Nyagaya, Kenya Country Director, Nutrition International, Callum Northcote, Senior Nutrition Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Save the Children, and Simon Bishop, CEO, Power of Nutrition. We are very grateful for the evidence provided by all the witnesses.

ICAI's findings

3. ICAI's Review emphasised the importance of nutrition to development, saying:

Good nutrition is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of an individual and a country. ... Within the context of the covid-19 pandemic, the need for good nutrition is further heightened: nutritional well-being can help protect the most vulnerable from the risk of severe illnesses.³

The Review also noted that globally, one in nine people are hungry and nearly half of all deaths among children under five are linked to undernutrition. Covid-19 and the associated response were predicted to cause a "huge increase in the number of people facing hunger and malnutrition".⁴

4. ICAI's Review made clear that the UK had a good record on tackling poor nutrition and reporting the results. It assessed the performance of the former Department for International Development (DFID), but in this report we refer in most cases to the merged FCDO. The Review found DFID had:

made important advances in response to ICAI's previous nutrition Review published in 2014, including significant progress on improving its nutrition results methodology, country programme implementation and national systems strengthening. Given that DFID only started scaling up its work on nutrition in 2013, these achievements are impressive.⁵

1 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020)

2 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Assessing DFID's results in nutrition September 2020](#) (October 2020)

3 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. i

4 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. i

5 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. ii

5. More broadly, ICAI described the UK government as “a leading advocate for tackling malnutrition in the world’s poorest countries”, noting that the UK hosted the global Hunger Summit during the London 2012 Olympic Games, and in 2013 co-hosted the first Nutrition for Growth Summit.⁶

6. Using its scoring system, ICAI gave the UK’s results in nutrition an overall Green/Amber score, indicating satisfactory achievement in most areas, but partial achievement in others.⁷

7. ICAI’s findings were made against three tests:

- **Effectiveness:** How valid are DFID’s reported nutrition results?
- **Equity:** Are DFID interventions reaching the most vulnerable and hard-to-reach women and children?
- **Efficiency:** To what extent is DFID helping to reduce malnutrition?

ICAI scored DFID as Green/Amber against each of the three tests.

ICAI Recommendations

8. The recommendations in the Review were directed to the FCDO and were intended to strengthen the new department’s future approach to nutrition. The recommendations were:

- 1: FCDO should capture and communicate progress against all goals in its nutrition strategy, including strengthening systems and leadership for improved nutrition.
- 2: FCDO should strengthen statistical capacity and quality assurance in-country and centrally, to support more accurate measurement of programme coverage and convergence, and to use the data to improve nutrition programming.
- 3: FCDO should strengthen systems for identifying and reaching the most marginalised women and children within its target groups.
- 4: FCDO should more consistently gather citizen feedback to help improve and tailor its nutrition programmes.
- 5: FCDO should scale up its work on making sustainable and nutritious diets accessible to all, to help address the double burden of malnutrition, through nutrition-sensitive agriculture and private sector development.
- 6: FCDO should work more closely with its partners to achieve the convergence of nutrition interventions, by aligning different sector programmes to focus on those communities most vulnerable to malnutrition.

9. In its response, the Government accepted all of ICAI’s recommendations.⁸

6 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID’s results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. 11

7 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID’s results in nutrition](#) (September 2020)

8 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Assessing DFID’s results in nutrition September 2020](#) (October 2020)

2 Effectiveness: How valid were DFID's reported nutrition results?

10. ICAI had a generally positive view of the results being achieved by UK aid programmes in improving nutrition. ICAI also saw the current methods of reporting performance on nutrition as being generally practical and useful for DFID country offices.⁹ ICAI concluded that “DFID met its reach target and pioneered a new results methodology, and most of its nutrition programmes have been delivering against their immediate objectives”.¹⁰

11. The Review did identify areas for future improvement, namely in relation to the accuracy of programme results and the measurement of their outcomes.¹¹ Dr Tamsyn Barton, Chief Commissioner, ICAI, told us that the Department did not adequately capture the impact of its “wider advocacy and technical assistance work”¹² The Government response to the ICAI Review accepted this point, saying that it was developing a “new results framework” for nutrition, which would track the outcomes and impacts of different types of FCDO support, including diplomatic engagement, technical assistance and service delivery.¹³

Data gathering

12. The Review identified data gathering on nutrition as a particular area for improvement. It recommended that the Department “strengthen statistical capacity and quality assurance in-country and centrally, to support more accurate measurement of programme coverage and convergence, and to use the data to improve nutrition programming.”¹⁴

13. ICAI's concerns centred on the poor quality of data systems, both at programme level and at country level, which was “one of the most significant challenges for DFID in accurately calculating its nutrition reach”. For example, “In some countries, a lack of robust monitoring data means that nutrition results are estimated based on local population data (in turn derived from national census data of variable quality).”¹⁵

14. The Government response said that the FCDO would “reassess the current methodology for monitoring the reach of our nutrition related programmes.”¹⁶ In a letter following up her appearance before us to give evidence, Wendy Morton MP, Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas, FCDO, told us that the Government aimed to have completed the actions set out in the Government response by September 2021. She said “[t]his will include producing guidance to support stronger monitoring of programmes ... building on recommendations made by ICAI.”¹⁷

9 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. ii

10 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. iii

11 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. ii

12 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p.ii

13 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Assessing DFID's results in nutrition September 2020](#) (October 2020), p 1.

14 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. iv

15 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. 18

16 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Assessing DFID's results in nutrition September 2020](#) (October 2020), p. 1

17 Wendy Morton MP, Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas, FCDO, ([NUT0001](#))

15. We welcome ICAI's positive assessment that UK nutrition programmes have generally been delivering against their objectives. This achievement will have an impact in improving nutrition and tackling malnutrition. However, work is still to be done to improve data gathering on nutrition, both centrally and in recipient countries. Following the expected completion date of September 2021, we would welcome an update on the progress made in implementing ICAI's recommendation on effective data use by 31 October.

3 Equity: Is the UK's support reaching the most vulnerable?

16. People affected by war, severe weather events and famine are among the most vulnerable and the most in need of immediate help with nutrition. ICAI was impressed by the UK's capacity to reach these groups. DFID reported that 85% of its nutrition results have come from countries categorised as "highly fragile" or "fragile", where stunting and wasting¹⁸ tend to be most acute. We also received powerful written evidence from The Action against Stunting Hub. This evidence sets out the devastating impact of stunting, and states "The only way to prevent stunting is to understand every single factor that contributes to stunting and develop interventions which eliminate these".¹⁹

17. Despite this, some of our witnesses were concerned that long-term nutrition needs might be forgotten in the press of events during humanitarian crises. Callum Northcote, Senior Nutrition Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Save the Children, welcomed the Government's statements about preventing and responding to famine. However, he also urged FCDO to "make sure that nutrition is sufficiently included within [famine responses] ... If we do not do that in the short term, we risk turning a short-term acute crisis of hunger into long-running malnutrition issues."²⁰

18. ICAI also found that DFID's interventions did not always reach the most marginalised within the target groups, for example households headed by a disabled person, migrant women, and those in the remotest communities". Furthermore, DFID did not always monitor the take-up of services by these groups.²¹ The Government response accepted that further steps should be taken to make sure no one was left behind, and committed to new analysis to identify those most at need and those least reached by nutrition services.²²

19. The announcement of a "tilt" of UK foreign policy focus towards the Indo-Pacific region in the *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* raised the question whether vulnerable groups—predominantly found in Africa—would continue to receive the attention they had been given in UK aid programmes.²³ When this was put to her in our evidence session, the Minister said: "There will be some focus on the Indo-Pacific, but importantly there will remain a focus on Africa"²⁴ and the Government's focus "obviously remains on vulnerable people".²⁵

18 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. iii. Children who do not have enough nourishment to grow properly are 'stunted'. Stunting is defined as length or height-for-age Z-score more than 2 standard deviations below the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards. Children who are too thin because of undernutrition are 'wasted'. Wasting is defined as weight-for-length or height Z-score more than 2 standard deviations below the median of the WHO Child Growth Standards. [Global Nutrition Report](#), Glossary, 2018; [Malnutrition Fact Sheet](#), WHO, 2020

19 The Action against Stunting Hub (NUT0002)

20 Q33 [Callum Northcote]

21 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. iii

22 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Assessing DFID's results in nutrition September 2020](#) (October 2020), p. 2

23 HM Government, [Global Britain in a competitive age The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), March 2021 p. 66,

24 Q12 [Wendy Morton]

25 Q10 [Wendy Morton]

20. ICAI also saw “a need for strengthening feedback mechanisms at the community level, to help ensure that the voices of the most marginalised are listened to, understood, and could inform the nutrition programmes.”²⁶ In her letter, the Minister told us that FCDO had “worked with technical assistance partners to embed stronger citizens feedback across our work. We will also be hosting a Nutrition Hub event across FCDO in June or July 2021 on the use of citizen feedback in nutrition programming”.²⁷

21. We welcome the good results that UK aid programmes have achieved in reaching some of the most marginalised people within the target groups for nutrition support. This work is often particularly difficult and hazardous, especially in conflict zones. We also welcome the Government's acceptance that further steps should be taken to make sure no one is left behind in the provision of nutrition. The steps that have been taken to embed stronger citizen feedback across the FCDO's work is a positive start.

Covid-19 and nutrition

22. The challenge of addressing malnutrition in developing countries has been exacerbated by the need to respond to the covid-19 pandemic. Dr Barton observed in our evidence session on 22 February that Africa had not seen infection rates as high as in Asia and Latin America. However, she warned that many people could be left behind and there was too much focus on relatively simple interventions such as the provision of vaccines.²⁸

23. The Minister told us that the impacts of covid-19 would threaten the progress that the UK had made in reducing malnutrition. Since the early stages of the pandemic, the FCDO had emphasised the importance of maintaining efforts to prevent malnutrition, “focused particularly on strengthening the monitoring of the impacts of covid-19 on nutrition”.²⁹ She outlined that nutrition support has been prioritised in Somalia, Yemen, South Sudan and Ethiopia as part of the Government's covid-19 response.³⁰

24. The Minister stated that “Acute malnutrition is estimated to have increased by 14% by the end of 2020 as a result of the indirect impacts of covid-19. Many countries, including those with a high malnutrition risk, have faced significant disruptions to key nutrition services such as breastfeeding support and delivery of vitamins.” During our evidence session, when pressed for further details on future nutrition support, the Minister said she was unable to provide that information while the FCDO was undertaking an internal reprioritisation process.³¹

25. It is vital that the UK and international community do not lose sight of the importance of maintaining support for nutrition while also combatting covid-19 and other diseases. Properly nourished people, especially women and children, are far better equipped to survive infectious disease and to prevent the spread of disease. We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out what action it is taking to improve nutrition in developing countries, and in particular where it forms part of the Government's covid-19 response.

26 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, *Assessing DFID's results in nutrition* (September 2020), p. 30

27 Wendy Morton MP, Minister for European Neighbourhood and the Americas, FCDO, ([NUT0001](#))

28 Q23 [Tamsyn Barton]

29 Q8 [Wendy Morton]

30 Q2 [Wendy Morton]

31 Q9 [Wendy Morton]

4 Impact: To what extent is UK aid helping to reduce malnutrition?

Strengths and weaknesses of UK nutrition programmes

26. The impact of UK programmes on nutrition was generally seen as highly positive by ICAI. The Review said: “By committing to a comprehensive approach that targets both the direct and the underlying causes of undernutrition, DFID’s nutrition strategy has been strongly evidence-based with the potential to be highly impactful.”³² ICAI also gave a broadly, though not universally, positive assessment of various other aspect of the UK programmes to tackle malnutrition. This impression was confirmed by the evidence we heard during our evidence session.

Strengthening the resilience of governments

27. One example of the UK’s positive impact was the work being done to strengthen recipient countries’ ability to formulate and implement more effective policies on nutrition. The Minister said the UK is “continuing to support the empowerment of Governments to lead their own efforts to address malnutrition. This is about that longer-term sustainability piece.”³³ Jonathan France, Review Lead, ICAI, thought this approach was having some success. He told us of ICAI’s attendance at a meeting of Zambia’s National Food and Nutrition Commission, where representatives from Zambian Government Ministries considered nutrition, agriculture, health, employment and skills. This cross-government initiative had been facilitated by DFID, and in his view, it would not have happened without DFID’s nutrition programmes.³⁴ Furthermore, Dr Barton cited research from the Institute of Development Studies which looked at the Government of Tanzania’s efforts on nutrition. She said, “it is really encouraging in this area that you can see improvement at country level in those countries that have really focused on it”.³⁵

28. Dr Barton also praised the work of the Scaling Up Nutrition movement which strengthens the capacity of governments to improve nutrition.³⁶ She welcomed “mobilisation at the community and district levels, right down to the most junior officials, including even the volunteers at village level” in tackling poor nutrition.³⁷ Martha Nyagaya, Kenya Country Director, Nutrition International, also told us how UK aid had supported locally-devolved government in Kenya to focus on preventing malnutrition:

We have a Technical Assistance for Nutrition programme that is funded by DFID. It seeks to improve the capacity of scaling up nutrition in countries to design, deliver and track the progress of nutrition programmes. With this grant, we have taken advantage of the fact that we now have a devolved system of government and the counties have autonomy to decide where to put money.³⁸

32 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. iii.

33 Q7 [Wendy Morton]

34 Q28 [Jonathan France]

35 Q25 [Tamsyn Barton]

36 Q20 [Tamsyn Barton]

37 Q20 [Tamsyn Barton]

38 Q31 [Martha Nyagaya]

The need for quality as well as quantity

29. We heard evidence from our witnesses that more work may be needed on the UK's approach to improving the quality of food. Simon Bishop, CEO, Power of Nutrition, told us that "we know what works in terms of quality and which interventions are most effective ... whether that be providing vitamin or mineral supplements, encouraging exclusive breastfeeding for six months and a wide range of other interventions".³⁹ Callum Northcote also emphasised the need to address quality, especially in respect of child nutrition, drawing particular attention to the importance of "treating micronutrient deficiencies and preventing them through ... supplements and fortifying foods, and deworming."⁴⁰

30. However, Dr Barton told us: "Looking at the agriculture programmes that were supported by the Department (DFID) at the time of our Review, the majority were focused on increased household consumption, whereas we need more focus on nutritious food, a reduction of stunting and dietary diversity."⁴¹ Martha Nyagaya was also not confident that aid took sufficient account of the need to improve food quality as well as food quantity, observing that key donors prioritised "food security interventions sometimes in their response, resilience building and recovery plans, without fully understanding the threat of malnutrition."⁴²

31. One of the less satisfactory features of aid for nutrition is a focus on the amount of food provided rather than on its quality. We were disappointed to hear that many UK programmes are failing to take full account of the need to improve dietary diversity and quality.

32. To help the Committee to better understand the balance between improving food quality and food quantity, the Government should set out how it considers these elements when undertaking nutrition programmes.

Working better with the private sector

33. Our witnesses described a mixed picture in terms of the work of UK aid with the private sector, especially in relation to improving the functioning of food systems. Dr Agnes Kalibata, UN Special Envoy for the 2021 Food Systems Summit, welcomed the UK's work in supporting private sector initiatives and small businesses.⁴³

34. However, the ICAI Review found that working with the private sector was not a strength of the UK aid effort. The Review states:

While progress has been made in improving the contribution of commercial agriculture programmes, at a country level the portfolio has not sufficiently expanded its focus on working with the private sector and country governments to strengthen nutritious food systems.⁴⁴

39 Q32 [Simon Bishop]

40 Q33 [Callum Northcote]

41 Q19 [Tamsyn Barton]

42 Q34 [Martha Nyagaya]

43 Q31 [Agnes Kalibata]

44 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [Assessing DFID's results in nutrition](#) (September 2020), p. 43

35. The Government gave a general and high-level response to the ICAI recommendation on this point, promising to “ensure FCDO teams understand how investments in agriculture and private sector development can boost availability and affordability of nutritious foods” and to “continue to strengthen the way nutrition outcomes are monitored in our Commercial Agriculture Portfolio Review”.⁴⁵

36. The Minister told us in evidence: “We are ... working on the adaptation of agriculture and private-sector programmes. Our commercial agriculture for smallholders and agribusiness programmes helps strengthen production of nutritious foods. This is helping the production capacity of smallholders in Malawi as well.”⁴⁶

37. Dr Barton told us that “It was good to hear that there is going to be a new focus” on such issues.” But she cautioned that for aid programmes, working effectively with the private sector “is really very challenging. Frankly, profits are much more easily made in selling biscuits than they are in sorghum, for example”.⁴⁷

38. The evidence we heard indicates there have been improvements in the way UK aid works with the private sector, and we also heard of a specific area of good practice. This is welcome, as commercial agriculture and other private sector players can play a key role in improving nutrition if they are well integrated with the aid effort. However, progress needs to be maintained. We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out in more detail how it will continue to ensure that best practice and lessons learned from cooperation with the private sector in existing programmes are fed through to new programmes.

Maintaining UK leadership on nutrition

39. As we noted in Chapter 2, ICAI found that DFID was considered a strong global leader in nutrition and had played an important role in increasing the international focus on undernutrition. The UK convened international events and supported the development of indicators for global nutrition targets. Martha Nyagaya added to this view, saying “The UK has played a critical role, particularly in Kenya and globally, as a leading investor, a thought leader and a convenor”.⁴⁸

40. The Minister informed us of the Government’s intention to depart from a stand-alone nutrition strategy, and said “we will publish an action plan on our commitment to ending preventable deaths this year ... This will build on the investments and results that we have achieved over the past decade”.⁴⁹ She expected this to “bring a bigger impact and efficiencies to the work we do in health; that includes nutrition.”⁵⁰

41. Martha Nyagaya welcomed the fact that work on nutrition would be “an integral part of broader work to end preventable deaths for mothers and children ... That means the right targets, an integrated approach and a broader framework that looks at food systems and nutrition, rather than a siloed approach”.⁵¹

45 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *FCDO Response to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact recommendations on: Assessing DFID's results in nutrition September 2020* (October 2020), p. 3

46 Q3 [Wendy Morton]

47 Q19 [Tamsyn Barton]

48 Q29 [Martha Nyagaya]

49 Q7 [Wendy Morton]

50 Q14 [Wendy Morton]

51 Q29 [Martha Nyagaya]

42. However, Callum Northcote was concerned by the move away from a specific strategy on nutrition:

A stand-alone strategy is really useful and important for an issue that is so cross cutting and needs that top-down focus ... Are we expecting to see the UK Government pushing forward with topline indicators that will allow us to impact on a strategy for ending preventable deaths? There are lots of positives, lots of good words, but we still really need that detail and clarity.⁵²

43. There were also a variety of views on whether the merger of the FCO and DFID would lend weight to the effort on nutrition. Dr Barton noted that “Any merger or machinery of government change carries transaction costs. A lot of time and energy is always devoted to setting up the new systems and structures.”⁵³ She also observed that integrating various closely-related sectors of the aid programme can in itself be difficult, saying

it is a challenge to work across sectors. That is even the case within the Department in the UK, let alone in developing countries. Whereas health was front and centre, social protection was closely concerned, and water, sanitation and hygiene were the next most integrated, the real challenge was reaching agriculture.⁵⁴

44. However, Dr Barton thought problems could be “mitigated if the new arrangements are better”. In that respect, she said there had been some “encouraging indications”, including the setting up of a new global health directorate, which “could bring an appropriate level of focus on nutrition”.⁵⁵

45. Darren Welch, Director of Global Health, FCDO, told us about the cross-Government approach to work on global health and nutrition. This involved very close collaboration with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Health and Social Care. He added that the creation of the new merged Department “enables us to be even more influential in how we interact with Governments around the world” as FCDO represents all the Government’s policies overseas.⁵⁶

46. Martha Nyagaya was more pessimistic about the impact of the DFID/FCO merger on the current active role being played by the UK on nutrition. She said there was “a real threat to the UK’s leadership in nutrition” and hoped that the UK’s Nutrition for Growth commitments would focus on impact and a pathway to self-reliance.⁵⁷ Callum Northcote also remained to be convinced that the new Government arrangements would work better, observing that “we still do not have the clarity on the specifics moving forward. That remains our concern ... the frameworks that are in place within Government.”⁵⁸

47. We heard mixed views on whether the decisions to merge the FCO and DFID and to depart from a stand-alone nutrition strategy would have a positive impact. Nonetheless, it will be vital to make the most of the opportunities offered by the creation

52 Q29 [Callum Northcote]

53 Q21 [Tamsyn Barton]

54 Q26 [Tamsyn Barton]

55 Q21 [Tamsyn Barton]

56 Q4 [Darren Welch]

57 Q29 [Martha Nyagaya]

58 Q29 [Callum Northcote]

of the FCDO to increase the coherence and global focus of the Government's wider approach on nutrition. This should include working across Government to ensure that the development aspects of nutrition policy are given the priority they deserve.

48. *Although the creation of the new FCDO health directorate is a step forward, this must not lead to any loss of focus on nutrition, which is central to success in so many aspects of development. The FCDO must continue to closely monitor progress against the key nutrition indicators and respond swiftly to urgent needs in crisis situations.*

Facing up to the complex challenges of the future

49. Several witnesses observed that the issues surrounding nutrition were becoming increasingly complex. Callum Northcote told us that “Probably the biggest issue ... is the complexity. When we think about hunger or nutrition, to some people it means health services. To some people it means food. To some people it means money in the pocket to be able to afford to buy things. It is all of these things.” This could “lead to a situation where everybody thinks somebody else is doing it. The biggest challenge to achieving this is getting those sectors working together.”⁵⁹

50. Martha Nyagaya agreed, telling us that the challenge was to “start taking steps to link health, nutrition and sustainable food systems, to address the complexities, governance issues and required partnerships, and to stop implementing these programmes in a siloed way.”⁶⁰ Dr Kalibata was concerned that “because of the fragility of our food system, we are not able to come through on SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals]. The food system impacts nearly everything across the 17 SDGs”.⁶¹ She noted that one key challenge was climate change: “I have seen farmers, from season to season, reeling from one climate change event to another. These were farmers who had very good profitability and were already beginning to move out of poverty. I saw them go back into poverty and have challenges of feeding their children.”⁶²

51. Dr Kalibata said that the UN Food Systems Summit, to be held in autumn 2021, was a chance to tackle these problems together and to “do things differently, if we start looking at all the issues we need to bring together ... especially in the face of covid-19.”⁶³ However, she was disappointed with the lack of enthusiasm from the UK Government for the Summit, and said “Honestly, if we do not pique enthusiasm around this Food System Summit and be part of ensuring that the food system we share for the future is about reducing the impact on climate change as well, what are we doing?”⁶⁴

52. The impacts of climate change and other challenges will make it difficult to maintain the positive results from nutrition programmes in years to come. In the medium and longer term, the UK will need to make significant adjustments to its aid programmes to take account of the interaction of climate change and other factors on food systems.

59 Q30 [Callum Northcote]

60 Q30 [Martha Nyagaya]

61 Q35 [Agnes Kalibata]

62 Q34 [Agnes Kalibata]

63 Q35 [Agnes Kalibata]

64 Q34 [Agnes Kalibata]

53. **Given these forthcoming difficulties, we were disappointed to hear from the UN Special Envoy that the UK had been showing a “lack of enthusiasm” for the coming Food Systems Summit. The UK has demonstrated leadership in the past decade, not least in convening similar international gatherings. However, some witnesses suggested that the UK had failed to provide full support to this important event, which has the potential to play a key role in tackling both malnutrition and climate change.**

5 Future of UK nutrition aid programmes

54. As has been set out in this report, and in ICAI's Review, the UK has a good story to tell in relation to the nutrition programmes it provides. However, the effectiveness of these programmes could now be in jeopardy because of cuts the UK Government is making in Official Development Assistance (ODA).

55. On 26 November 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced a reduction in the overseas aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI.⁶⁵ This means that, for the first time since 2013, the UK will not meet the UN recommended target of spending 0.7% of GNI on ODA. The global pandemic resulted in a significant forecast reduction in the size of the UK economy, which would have resulted in cuts to ODA spending in-year even without the reduced spending target. The reduction in the spending target will make this reduction even larger than it would have been anyway.

56. We raised the effect of this reduction in ODA during the evidence session with our witnesses. Martha Nyagaya was optimistic that the budget-setting process for UK aid would recognise the central importance of nutrition in development, expressing confidence that “the UK will be in a good place to provide the right interventions at the right time.”⁶⁶ However, Callum Northcote expressed concern about the impact of “budget cuts and implications at a macroeconomic level across the world, if leaders on specific issues step back.”⁶⁷ Simon Bishop added that despite a decade of success and “amazing leadership” from UK Government on nutrition, “we are deeply concerned about the potential impact of cuts that are likely to come in the weeks ahead, potentially to nutrition ... those cuts are not smart. In fact, they are the opposite of smart.”⁶⁸

57. When we asked Dr Barton whether nutrition programmes should be protected from cuts in ODA, she said:

There is obviously a risk that, if there are cuts in this area, that might take the foot off the pedal and be seen as a signal by others at a time when donors are moving to other priorities ... Broadly speaking, I would say there is a strong rights-based and investment case for protecting nutrition investment at a time of cuts.⁶⁹

58. When we questioned the Minister, she said, referring to Nutrition for Growth and funding in previous years, “we have already exceeded our commitment to invest £2.13 billion in nutrition-sensitive programmes between 2013 and 2020. To date, we have spent £2.7 billion on this type of programme.” However, she could give us no information about the future funding of these programmes.⁷⁰

65 HC Deb, 25 November 2020, [col 830](#)

66 Q29 [Martha Nyagaya]

67 Q30 [Callum Northcote]

68 Q29 [Simon Bishop]

69 Q23 [Tamsyn Barton]

70 Q15 [Wendy Morton]

59. Since the announcement of a reduction in ODA to 0.5%, the Foreign Secretary has made two related Written Ministerial Statements. On 26 January 2021, he set out ODA allocations for all government departments for the 2021/22 financial year. These total approximately £10 billion, which represents a cumulative cut of around £5 billion or one-third of the UK aid budget compared to 2019.⁷¹ On 21 April 2021 he confirmed that the Government would for 2021–22 “allocate our resources for the purposes of poverty reduction to seven priorities: climate and biodiversity, covid-19 and global health, girls’ education, science and research, open societies and force for good, humanitarian assistance, and trade.”⁷² The WMS gave no specific detail on how much of the spending on health would be allocated to nutrition, and no further information about country allocations.

60. Given that the evidence we heard made clear the development benefits of UK support to nutrition, we feel it is unhelpful that, months into the relevant financial year, those responsible for such vital programmes still do not know how much has been allocated to support their work. *We recommend that, in response to this report, the Government sets out what its expenditure on nutrition programmes will be in 2021–22, and how this has been conveyed to those delivering these programmes.*

71 HC Deb, 26 January 2021, [col 3WS](#)

72 HC Deb, 21 April 2021, [col 37WS](#)

6 Conclusion

61. As ICAI's review makes clear, under the auspices of DFID, important advances have been made in relation to nutrition programmes, often as part of longer-term country strategies for tackling undernutrition. As a result, the UK Government exceeded its target of reaching 50 million women of childbearing age, adolescent girls and children under five between 2015 and 2020. The successes of these programmes will have made a huge impact on the lives of these people.

62. ICAI's review process has identified some areas where the Government's approach could be strengthened. We are pleased that FCDO accepted all of ICAI's recommendations, and during our evidence session we received a useful update on the actions being taken so far to implement these.

63. Given the UK's strong performance, evidenced in this review, this is an area in which the FCDO can take a lead on the global stage. There is a good basis on which to capitalise on the positive progress made to date, and we would encourage the new department to prioritise in this area, as sustained effort is required to eradicate malnutrition.

Formal minutes

Sub-Committee on the work of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact

Wednesday 7 July 2021

Members present:

Theo Clarke, in the Chair

Sarah Champion Mr Virendra Sharma

Chris Law

Draft report (*Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 63 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the report be the First report of the Sub-Committee to the Committee.

Ordered, That the Chair make the report to the Committee.

[Adjourned to a date and time to be fixed by the Chair.]

International Development Committee

Tuesday 13 July 2021

Members present:

Sarah Champion, in the Chair

Theo Clarke	Chris Law
Brendan Clarke-Smith	Kate Osamor
Mrs Pauline Latham	Mr Virendra Sharma

Draft report from the Sub-Committee (*Assessing DFID's results in nutrition Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI*) brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 63 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the report be the First report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 20 July at 1.45 p.m.]

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Wednesday 24 February 2021

Wendy Morton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for European Neighbourhood and the Americas, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office; **Darren Welch**, Director of Global Health, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

[Q1-17](#)

Dr Tamsyn Barton, Chief Commissioner, Independent Commission for Aid Impact; **Jonathan France**, Review Lead, Independent Commission for Aid Impact

[Q18-28](#)

Simon Bishop, CEO, The Power of Nutrition; **Callum Northcote**, Senior Nutrition Policy and Advocacy Advisor, Save the Children; **Agnes Kalibata**, President, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) and UN Special Envoy for the Food Systems Summit; **Martha Nyagaya**, Kenya Country Director, Nutrition International

[Q29-35](#)

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

NUT numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office ([NUT0001](#))
- 2 The Action against Stunting Hub ([NUT0002](#))

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

Session 2019–21

Number	Title	Reference
1st Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya	HC 259 (HC 658)
2nd Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: interim findings	HC 215 (HC 820)
3rd Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI	HC 260 (HC 742)
4th Report	Effectiveness of UK aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger	HC 596 (HC 820)
5th Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings)	HC 292 (HC 1160)
6th Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 535 (HC 1198)
7th Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries	HC 605 (HC 1332)
8th Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts	HC 1186 (HC 1351)
9th Report	The UK's support to the African Development Bank Group: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI	HC 1055
10th Report	The humanitarian situation in Tigray	HC 1289
1st Special Report	Follow up: sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee	HC 127
2nd Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: the Rohingya: Government Response to the First Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 658
3rd Special Report	The Newton Fund review: report of the Sub-Committee on the work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Third Report	HC 742
4th Special Report	Effectiveness of UK Aid: Interim Report & Effectiveness of UK Aid: potential impact of FCO/DFID merger: Government Response to the Second & Fourth Reports	HC 820
5th Special Report	Humanitarian crises monitoring: impact of coronavirus (interim findings): Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2019–21	HC 1160
6th Special Report	The Changing Nature of UK Aid in Ghana Review: report from the Sub-Committee on the Work of ICAI: Government response to the Committee's Sixth Report	HC 1198

Number	Title	Reference
7th Special Report	Progress on tackling the sexual exploitation and abuse of aid beneficiaries: Government Response to the Seventh Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1332
8th Special Report	Covid-19 in developing countries: secondary impacts: Government Response to the Eighth Report of the Committee, Session 2019–21	HC 1351